

APPENDIX E.

FINAL EVALUATION SUMMARY INFORMATION FOR LAKE COUNTY DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

In the western part of the lower peninsula, about halfway between Grand Rapids and Traverse City, Lake County is one of the least populous counties in Michigan. The primary innovation of the demonstration project is that the former part-time probate judge of Lake County is now the full-time resident judge of the Trial Court, hearing all matters arising in the county, with backup from the 51st Circuit Court judge in Mason County and the 78th District Court judge in Newaygo County.⁴⁶

Table E-1 below summarizes findings for Lake County under core evaluation criteria. Tables E-2, E-3 and E-4 summarize results from focus group meetings facilitated by NCSC evaluators in April 1998. Table E-5 summarizes findings under special evaluation criteria.

⁴⁶ For more details, see David Steelman, Karen Gottlieb, and Dawn Rubio, *Michigan Trial Court Consolidation, Volume Five: Final Evaluation of Lake County Demonstration Project* (Denver, CO: National Center for State Courts, Court Services Division, 1998).

TABLE E-1.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR LAKE COUNTY
UNDER CORE EVALUATION CRITERIA*

Core Criterion	Summary of Final Evaluation Findings
1. How does consolidation affect the use of judicial and quasi judicial resources?	<p>The former part-time probate judge for the county now sits full time to hear all matters, with the 51st Circuit Court and 78th District Court judges exchanging backup judicial support as needed. The county now has court sessions five days a week, so that events can be scheduled sooner in each case. The resident judge is also available to deal immediately with emergency matters. In addition, the other two judges can give more time to their duties in Mason and Newaygo Counties. The resident judge's two-year conflict period as a new full-time judge passed in 1998, so that his colleagues need no longer hear disqualification cases involving his former clients. The blanket cross assignment policy among these three judges has caused a sharp drop in the need for judges from other counties. The three judges realize that complex civil cases, felony sentencing, landlord/tenant matters, and guardianship or conservatorships in estate matters make them less than fully fungible. Yet the resident judge hears all matters arising in the county, and each of three judges has heard a variety of matters for his colleagues in the project, including contested motions and trials as well as ex parte matters and uncontested motions. As the chief judge of the project, the resident judge works closely with the court administrator, court staff, and county officials. As for quasi judicial officers, the FOC referee heard dramatically fewer support enforcement motions in 1997 than in 1995. The resident judge also shares contested juvenile hearings. Since the commencement of the demonstration project, the district magistrate has done many fewer criminal arraignments (doing them only when the judge is not available); in turn, she has done more informal traffic hearings and small claims mediation.</p>
2. What is the effect of having a family division as part of each demonstration project?	<p>The resident judge sits in all three of the "separate" trial divisions, with backup support from the other two judges. Creation of the family division in Lake County is thus a means to organize the work of court staff members with family cases. With the resident judge sitting full time in Lake County, the FOC can have orders signed by the judge and have arraignments on warrants every day, instead of having to wait for the circuit court judge to arrive or to travel to Mason County to have him sign orders. Having the judge sitting every day in the county has also meant more regularity in juvenile hearings. Because the judge sits in district court as well as juvenile matters, there can be more creative treatment (e.g., community service) of older juveniles committing offenses as they near the age of majority. The probate court juvenile staff and the staff of the Friend of the Court (FOC) relocated to a different building near the courthouse a few months before the beginning of the demonstration project. Located together in that building, they constitute the staff of the Trial Court's family division. Because they are in a separate building, the Trial Court hired a secretary/receptionist to perform a number of court support functions, including assistance to citizens to direct them to the location of court proceedings. (All filings are still done at the intake office in the courthouse.) With such proximity, FOC staff and juvenile officers have been in closer working contact, collaborating on some children with both support orders and foster care placements. A final area in which family court operations are affected by the demonstration project has to do with access to information. With court clerical staff consolidated in a single intake office for all court matters, it is easier for the FOC staff to cross-check for cases in other forums. Computer access by the FOC staff and by juvenile officers to the case information systems of the circuit court and district court greatly enhances ability to cross-check as well. This ability should be all the more significant as probate case processing and case information for court matters are automated.</p>

* For more details, see David Steelman, Karen Gottlieb and Dawn Rubio, *Michigan Trial Court Consolidation. Volume Five: Final Evaluation of Lake County Demonstration Project* (Denver, CO: National Center for State Courts, Court Services Division, 1998), Chapter II.

TABLE E-1 (continued).
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR LAKE COUNTY
UNDER CORE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Core Criterion	Summary of Final Evaluation Findings
<p>3. How does consolidation affect the cost-effectiveness of court operations (e.g., by reducing administrative and service duplications)?</p>	<p>Having a full-time judge and cross assignment among the three judges in the project has sharply reduced the costs for out-of-county visiting judges in the county. The court reduced the size of its pending inventory of "circuit" cases between 1995 and the end of 1997, in part because of reduced filings. Reduced estate filings also contributed to a drop in pending cases by the end of 1997. Juvenile delinquency and child protection cases increased significantly from 1995 to the end of 1997. A dramatic improvement in pending case age of both criminal/traffic and civil "district" cases occurred between November 1996 and December 1998. There has been a general decrease in 1998 in the percentage of cases pending longer than state time guidelines, and this is clearly related to the daily presence of a full-time judge who can schedule and dispose of matters more expeditiously. Consolidation has had a dramatic impact on the court's fine and fee collection: collections in 1997 were 65% higher than in 1995. Creation of a single intake office for all court filings required cross training of court personnel, and a new staff person was added as a secretary/receptionist. It is now much easier for citizens to conduct business at the court, and there is improved exchange of case information within the court. Creation of a single jury pool for all court divisions has resulted in efficiencies, although the county's total costs are small. In 1998, the court submitted a flat-fee contract for all court-appointed attorney services, sharply reducing indigent defense costs for the county. There has been no merger of felony and misdemeanor probation services in the county. But the full-time juvenile casework supervisor/referee now does all district court assessments, saving the cost of a former part-time district court probation officer.</p>
<p>4. How does consolidation affect key stakeholders' perceptions of court operations?</p>	<p>The overwhelming perception among those interviewed was that having a full-time resident judge hearing all matters has significant benefits -- greater availability to citizens, easier scheduling, easier access to a judge to have matters heard or orders signed, and expedited case processing. Attorneys and citizens have greater convenience -- attorney matters can all be scheduled for the day an attorney is at the courthouse, and there are fewer court appearances required for counsel and parties in criminal and family matters. Having a single intake office for all cases is easier for attorneys filing papers, for citizens asking questions, and for court staff seeking case information. Having a consolidated court with a unified budget means that county officials need deal with only one court official -- the court administrator -- instead of three judges. Negative perceptions include the observation that conflicts for the full-time resident judge still create scheduling problems (although the number of conflict cases is dropping as time passes). At first, judges and court staff were sometimes uncomfortable dealing with matters in which they had limited experience, although time and cross training for staff have alleviated that problem. Finally, the changes in scheduling have made it difficult at times for probation officers to complete their work, because for both felonies and misdemeanors they may not be present when a plea is entered and it is determined that a presentence investigation is needed. (See Tables E-2, E-3 and E-4 for highlights of positive and negative perceptions by members of each focus group.)</p>

TABLE E-1 (continued).
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR LAKE COUNTY
UNDER CORE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Core Criterion	Summary of Final Evaluation Findings
5. Does consolidation promote improved coordination with court-related agencies?	<p>The consolidation of clerical staff in a single intake office for the Trial Court created a staffing problem for the county clerk. When the deputy county clerk became the full-time supervisor of the intake office, the county clerk had to engage a new staff person to carry out non-court functions. In her role as county administrator, the county clerk is responsible for all grants sought by the county. The consolidation makes her dealings with the court easier. She deals directly with the court administrator, instead of dealing with the different perspectives of the judges of three different courts. By expediting the pace of litigation, the demonstration project has helped to alleviate the county sheriff's concerns about prisoners being detained for long periods awaiting trial. This has also resulted in a change in the mix of prisoners housed in the jail, with a smaller ratio of persons in pretrial detention. The daily presence of a full-time judge makes it easier for the sheriff to have papers signed. While it has a small resident population, Lake County is a recreation area, particularly for fish and game enthusiasts. In this environment, the officer from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has active law enforcement responsibilities and brings about 175-200 fish and game violations before the court every year. Because the court now has a full-time judge and is no longer sharing the district court judge with Newaygo County, the DNR cases move much more quickly to disposition. Because of the faster court process and the expansion of trial days, the county prosecutor has added a part-time assistant prosecutor in order to manage criminal matters before the court. The prosecutor believes that his office is now more efficient because he can schedule better and is also firmer on plea bargaining because now he knows he has time to go to trial. Probation agents of DOC find it easier to schedule clients for presentence investigation (PSI) reports. Even though the resident judge in Lake County must sometimes have cases reassigned because of disqualifications, they find that cases move more expeditiously. A problem with having one judge hear all matters, however, is that they find it less predictable when felony defendants will enter guilty pleas, after which appointments must be scheduled with DOC agents for PSI reports. Representatives of the State Department of Mental Health and the Family Independence Agency (FIA) work in abuse and neglect cases with juvenile officers on the provision of services to children and their families, and they also interact with FOC and court staff in guardianship cases. Not as a direct result of the demonstration project implementation, but happening at about the same time, the staff of the Mental Health Agency have recently been engaged in a heightened level of communication with the Trial Court's juvenile officers about their respective roles and services. Juvenile officers are working closely with FIA on the provision of "wraparound" services to juveniles.</p>

TABLE E-1 (continued).
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR LAKE COUNTY
UNDER CORE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Core Criterion	Summary of Final Evaluation Findings
<p>6. What effect do “obstacles to change” and “change enhancers” have on consolidation?</p>	<p>All three judges in the project had to overcome uneasiness taking types of cases with which they have not dealt extensively in recent years on the bench, and for which they may not be as efficient as a judge who deals more often with such cases. Clerical personnel were initially resistant to being pooled in a single intake office on the first floor of the courthouse, and each felt a level of “incompetence” in dealing with files, procedures, scheduling and the case information systems for unfamiliar case types. But the court administrator and deputy administrator have organized regular cross training sessions for clerical staff. The Trial Court is hampered by the absence of a second jury courtroom. If the county had a second courtroom, two judges might sit at the same time to hold trials or hearings and help even more to reduce the size and age of the pending inventory in the court. Because the resident Trial Court judge formerly served in a part-time status, he initially had to disqualify himself in cases involving parties who had recently been clients in his private law practice, and scheduling problems often arose when the other two judges in the project had to take disqualification cases. The need for such disqualification assignments began to drop off after only three months of demonstration project implementation, and the problem was eliminated as the resident judge reached two years of full-time service in 1998. Before the demonstration project, the county had only limited need for court support staff. Since the commencement of the project, however, the Trial Court has made the former deputy county clerk the full-time supervisor of the intake office. After the creation of the intake office, the Trial Court also hired an additional clerk/receptionist to assist with filing and office operations, and also to direct participants in family matters to the building across the street housing FOC and juvenile personnel. While each of these changes resulted in increased costs to the county, there was sufficient additional revenue to pay for them. The demonstration project’s daily court session was creating scheduling difficulties for the district court probation officer, who must also serve Newaygo County, and who found that she had to make a special effort to stay abreast of requirements to prepare presentence investigation reports. In 1998, this problem was solved when the probation officer was reassigned solely to Newaygo County, and the full-time probate juvenile casework supervisor/referee in Lake County was assigned to do assessments for its district court cases.</p> <p>To offset the possible problems presented by such obstacles as those above, the demonstration project has several positive features that will tend to promote the chance of its success. The small size of the county meant that all the key actors in the demonstration project implementation knew each other well and were able to work together. A key consideration in the success to date of the implementation effort in Lake County has been the commitment, flexibility and cooperation of the judges with each other, the county commissioners and county clerk/administrator. While trial court consolidation has required flexibility and commitment from the three judges involved in the demonstration project, its implementation is also benefitted greatly from the capacity of court administrative leaders and staff members to deal with the numerous day-to-day operational details and problems associated with consolidation. The demonstration project would be impossible to carry out without the support of county commissioners, the county clerk/administrator, the county prosecutor and the county sheriff. The project has not had to deal with union concerns. Without the labor-management issues associated with the presence of one or more unions, it has been easier for court and county leaders to take steps necessary to support the consolidation effort, such as the creation of the intake office for the Trial Court. Finally, the relocation of FOC personnel and juvenile officers and staff has facilitated communication and coordination and promoted the effectiveness of the family division.</p>

TABLE E-1 (continued).
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR LAKE COUNTY
UNDER CORE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Core Criterion	Summary of Final Evaluation Findings
<p>7. Does consolidation result in improved use of court information systems or other technology, and is that linked to enhanced court efficiency?</p>	<p>Before commencement of the demonstration project, Lake County had automated case information systems for circuit and district court, and the FOC office had a separately funded automated child support enforcement system for its case information. A major automation initiative under the demonstration project has been to provide computerization of case information for the probate and juvenile personnel. In late 1996, installation was completed and staff members received training on the use of the hardware and software. With this capacity, it is possible for juvenile and estate information to be more readily available on line to the judges and staff of the Trial Court.</p> <p>Court leaders anticipated that the demonstration project would provide means for DOC probate agents dealing with circuit court felony cases to have automated on-line access to information on all court cases. The DOC relocated its probation agents to a new building, however, so that implementation of plans for creating an on-line link has been held in abeyance. A final part of the automation improvement effort under the demonstration project was to install cashiering systems for the Trial Court's intake office computers. With the automated cash draw systems, court fee receipts are recorded directly on-line in the county's general ledger. This has the obvious positive consequence of expedited transmission of cash receipts management information from the court to the county.</p>
<p>8. What effect does consolidation have on court budgeting?</p>	<p>The court consolidation has had a very positive effect on the court budgeting process in Lake County. The county commissioners and county administrator no longer have to deal separately with three different judges, each with a separate style and agenda. Instead, they deal primarily now with just the trial court administrator. Also, Lake County has been able to negotiate new agreements with their sister counties that have shared jurisdictions. For example, previous to consolidation Lake County was paying 33% of Mason county's circuit court budget and now is only paying 15% because of a lesser need and Newaygo county has severed all court funding ties. In keeping with Supreme Court requirements, the Lake County Trial Court administrator submitted a uniform budget to local authorities in December 1997 for calendar year 1998. A larger Trial Court budget for 1997 was due in large part to the addition of staff members and the transition of others to full-time status. The increased budget expenditures have been offset by a sharp increase in district court receipts since the start of the demonstration project, brought about by a faster court process that accelerates receipt of fines and fees. In late 1996, county officials acted on the uniform joint budget submitted by the trial court administrator. The commissioners chose to keep the salaries and wages for court staff members separate, under the Probate Court, the 51st Circuit Court, and the 78th District Court. For 1998, all budgets are unified, except for child care and FOC due to federal funding constraints.</p>

**TABLE E-2. APRIL 1998 PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNAL
STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT COURT OPERATIONS AND
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN LAKE COUNTY* (N=8)**

Question Asked	Highlights of Positive Perceptions	Highlights of Negative Perceptions
1. What comes to mind when you hear the term unified or consolidated court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running all courts under one umbrella • Good idea, one judge can handle one family • We're all one, all pulling together for one cause • One intake center to streamline services, people can be directed from one office • Judge availability speeds up court process • FOC sees paperwork faster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
2. What are the benefits of working within a unified/consolidated court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-training allows clerks to be more flexible in what days they can take off • Cross-training allows clerks to return from vacation and not be swamped with backlog • Easier to get help because more people know the answer • Having a judge on site every day is more efficient • Everything is funneled through intake office, one control of judge's docket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosecutor is also a referee for child support cases, which causes a conflict
3. Has the consolidation resulted in more efficient use of time for judges and referees?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time for each case, because before demonstration project all probate cases were only heard on two days • Judge has set docket and can schedule better • FOC office has its own referee one day a month • Juvenile probation referee has set days now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
4. What is the effect of having a family division as part of the court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FOC knows what is happening in Probate Court • Information is more readily available to juvenile probation caseworkers • Before the three judges may not have communicated with one another about cases; One judge/one family looks at all cases involving one family • Contract attorneys can follow a case through system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

* Source: April 1998 focus group conducted by NCSC evaluators.

**TABLE E-2 (continued). APRIL 1998 PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNAL
STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT COURT OPERATIONS AND
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN LAKE COUNTY (N=8)**

Question Asked	Highlights of Positive Perceptions	Highlights of Negative Perceptions
5. Have court operations been streamlined and made more efficient since the consolidation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intake office making more use of computer system now, can pull statistics from it • Intake office can run a cross-check search on cases in circuit and district court • Case processing improved, because PSI took four weeks before project began 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Corrections does not have access to criminal files on computer • Juvenile cases not integrated with circuit and district cases on computer • Only one mailbox key, have to wait until intake office gets mails and distributes it; keeps FOC from distributing checks later in the day, particularly bad on Mondays and Tuesdays
6. Has court consolidation improved communication and coordination with court-related agencies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juvenile probation always had a good relationship with court-related agencies, but now mental health is no longer in the small building-need to call Ludington to talk to someone at mental health who is across the street • Intake clerks working more with FIA now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem with agencies outside the state
7. Have the changes under the consolidation project had an overall positive or negative effect on the quality of service to citizens by court staff members?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-stop shopping" at intake • All collections except tickets go through central intake office – makes it easier for people who owe for several different cases. • Access to judge better • FOC is having their hearings faster • Rights of defendants are improved, show cause hearings happening faster • Easier for court to follow up on probationers who miss a treatment • One judge/one family more convenient for people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

**TABLE E-2 (continued). APRIL 1998 PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNAL
STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT COURT OPERATIONS AND
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN LAKE COUNTY (N=8)**

Question Asked	Highlights of Positive Perceptions	Highlights of Negative Perceptions
8. Have the changes under the consolidation project had an overall positive or negative effect on how you feel about your job?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall a positive • Better now we're over adjustment period, first 6-8 months rough • Likes job, judge is easy to get along with • Department of Corrections looking forward to coming into new courthouse, better communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intake office not happy about new courthouse: will have cubicles and no windows • FOC staff not happy about coming into new courthouse: they like being separate
9. Has court consolidation reduced duplication of services by different court staff members?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not completely: State wants identical forms from Probate and Circuit court for collections reporting because they go into different funds
10. How did the court facilities affect the operation of the consolidation effort?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If DOC were in courthouse, they would not always be telephoning court staff
11. How, if at all, did the temporary nature of the demonstration project affect your willingness to participate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have always wanted consolidation to work • Afraid to go back to the way it was 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
12. Are there further changes that should be made (such as with court facilities) in order to improve court operations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court, not the County Clerk, should have control over Circuit Court records because they understand their value • Should be paid more now because of cross-training • Safety concerns from interactions with dangerous people who know you because it's a small town
13. If the "change process" associated with the implementation of the consolidation were to start today, how might it be done differently for you to do your job well?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More communication from above • Have more frequent meetings • No troubleshooter during transition • Need more space – Intake people had to adjust
14. All things considered, how would you rate the success of the court consolidation project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Above average success rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FOC has not felt the effect of consolidation
15. Should the project continue or terminate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All agree it should continue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

TABLE E-3. APRIL 1998 PERSPECTIVES OF REGULAR INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPANT FOCUS GROUP ABOUT COURT OPERATIONS AND DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN LAKE COUNTY * (N=8)

Question Asked	Highlights of Positive Perceptions	Highlights of Negative Perceptions
1. What comes to mind when you hear the term unified or consolidated court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More accessible, one judge here all the time • Multiple problems through one judge • One judge/one family • Something experimental, a way to try and correct problem in justice system • One judge doing it all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State police have not noticed that much of a change
2. What are the benefits of working within a unified/consolidated court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much more efficient, people don't have to keep coming back • Can see the benefit because also work in other counties that don't have consolidation • Importance of continuity with one judge instead of three, each judge does not have to be educated • Seems that they are turning around warrants faster • Better access with local judge • Having one judge allows you to predict what he will do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
3. Has the consolidation resulted in more efficient use of time for judges and referees?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better flow with one judge • Time saving, judge does not have to keep bringing himself up to speed • Same judge does prelim as well as trial, judge already has feel for case • Can get judge easier on an ex parte conference • Judge no longer has part-time law practice and does not have to disqualify himself, no longer have to adjourn waiting for a visiting judge to come 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
4. What is the effect of having a family division as part of the court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dysfunctional family only deals with one judge • Whole system is more efficient, there is an interplay between FOC and juvenile, now, you know what is going on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
5. Have court operations been streamlined and made more efficient since the consolidation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State police don't have to bring back prisoners for hearing because now process is further along, e.g., pleas at pretrial conference • Sheriff has most of his prisoner transportation work on Monday and Tuesday, so bring in extra people those days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

**TABLE E-3 (continued). APRIL 1998 PERSPECTIVES OF REGULAR INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPANT
FOCUS GROUP ABOUT COURT OPERATIONS AND DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN LAKE COUNTY
(N=8)**

Question Asked	Highlights of Positive Perceptions	Highlights of Negative Perceptions
6. Has court consolidation improved communication and coordination with court-related agencies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheriff satisfied with communication • Much more of a system in court, in almost daily contact • Only four local members of the bar, they were informed by judge in chambers • Easier to negotiate public defender contract because only one judge • Attorneys have a mailbox in central office now 	State police commented that until letter came about focus group did not know that the court had unified
7. Has court consolidation had a positive or negative impact on the cost of operating the courts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less administration work for public defender • Less overtime needs to be paid for court appearances because fewer appearances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
8. Has court consolidation led to improved or worsened services to regular participants, such as you and the public at large?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved communication among court operations • Better services now • Used to several people scheduling the judges' time, now just one, that is better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
9. Have the changes under the trial court consolidation project had an overall positive or negative effect on the way you do your work in the court process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive, people do not have to come back a lot, easier for public defender, clients – could not manage public defender caseload with old system • Positive, a better system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIA and Department of Corrections have noticed no change
10. Have the changes under the consolidation project had an overall positive or negative effect on the quality of justice in the court process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good to have a full-time local judge • More consistency, other judges did not know Baldwin and what was going on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
11. Are there further changes that should be made (such as with court facilities) in order to improve court operations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better scheduling with attorneys' offices
12. If the "change process" associated with the implementation of the consolidation were to start today, how might it be done differently for you to do your job well?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone believed they were kept well informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

TABLE E-3 (continued). APRIL 1998 PERSPECTIVES OF REGULAR INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPANT FOCUS GROUP ABOUT COURT OPERATIONS AND DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN LAKE COUNTY (N=8)

Question Asked	Highlights of Positive Perceptions	Highlights of Negative Perceptions
13. All things considered, how would you rate the success of the court consolidation project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 or 10 (on a scale with 10 being the highest rating) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
14. Should the project continue or terminate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolutely continue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

**TABLE E-4. APRIL 1998 PERSPECTIVES OF INFORMED CITIZEN
FOCUS GROUP ABOUT COURT OPERATIONS AND
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN LAKE COUNTY* (N=9)**

Question Asked	Highlights of Positive Perceptions	Highlights of Negative Perceptions
1. What comes to mind when you hear the term unified or consolidated court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency • Much faster • More accessible • Judge is able to keep up with case • More user friendly, user knows where to be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
2. What are the benefits of working within a unified/consolidated court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judge knows the individual; prosecutor can intercede faster – can bring up other issues at initial hearing • Judge more responsible to Lake County – visiting judges did not seem as concerned about the ramifications of their decisions • Collections are up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can local judge be objective when he knows the people before him well? • Intake office is terribly busy
3. Have the changes under the consolidation project had an overall positive or negative effect on the quality of justice in the court process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Things are moving faster • Support staff are well organized and efficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
4. Have the changes under the consolidation project had an overall positive or negative effect on the quality of service to citizens by court staff members outside the courtroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticed collaborative work by court staff • Courtroom is always busy • Cases are moving much more quickly • Community thinks court staff are very helpful • Easier to get to speak to a judge to get questions answered • All staff are knowledgeable • Jurors have to wait around less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
5. How has the consolidation affected your perceptions of the courts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone involved wants it to work • No one would say worse impression; people would say better or the same • Have ownership of court, not stepchild anymore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
6. Have the changes under the consolidation project had any effect on the cost-effectiveness of court operations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals that are assessed are paying fines due to better tracking of cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

* Source: April 1998 focus group conducted by NCSC evaluators.

TABLE E-4 (continued). APRIL 1998 PERSPECTIVES OF INFORMED CITIZEN FOCUS GROUP ABOUT COURT OPERATIONS AND DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN LAKE COUNTY (N=9)

Question Asked	Highlights of Positive Perceptions	Highlights of Negative Perceptions
7. Has court consolidation improved access to the courts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, three part-timers do not add up to one full-time judge • Lower stress level, judges are not running around as much 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
8. Are there further changes that should be made (such as with court facilities) in order to improve court operations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New court facilities • Technology/computers • Two full-time prosecutors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
9. How would you rate the success of the court consolidation project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very successful • 10 out of 10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

**TABLE E-5.
SUMMARY OF FINAL EVALUATION FINDINGS
UNDER SPECIAL CRITERIA FOR LAKE COUNTY***

Special Criterion	Summary of Findings
5A. What is the effect of having one resident judge in Lake County to handle the entire caseload on a full-time basis?	Scheduling is easier and events are scheduled sooner. Access to a judge is easier for litigants. Fewer court appearances are necessary per case. Having a faster court process with events scheduled sooner, the court receives fine and fee payments sooner. Costs are reduced for visiting judges. With the resident judge always present, it is possible for the court to schedule all of an attorney's events for the day when she or he is in the county. Now that the resident judge sits full time, he is hearing most initial arraignments in criminal cases and some of the juvenile matters, so that the district magistrate and county juvenile officer can perform other functions. Having a full time judge for criminal matters has required adjustments in the provision of felony and misdemeanor probation services. Finally, the judges of the 51st Circuit Court and 78th District Court can each be more available in the <i>other</i> county for which he is responsible.
5B. What is the impact of the Lake County Adjunct Advisory Committee on the effectiveness of the consolidated trial court demonstration project?	The Advisory Committee gives the Judicial Management Council feedback on financial and personnel issues. Its existence has helped to promote an already-good working relationship between the court administrator and the county clerk/administrator. It has provided a vehicle for the county commissioners to be involved in the court reform effort. The cooperative attitude of the judges has helped engender support for the project from the commissioners and county administrator.
5C. What are the results of having one intake office receive all court filings?	After transitional difficulties, the clerical personnel have responded positively to the merger of clerk's office functions. Citizens coming to the courthouse now need come to only one location for all court business. The intake office is also more efficient for court and county staff members. Intake office staff members have become more facile in providing information to FOC and juvenile staff as well as members of the bar.

* For more details, see David Steelman, Karen Gottlieb, and Dawn Rubio, *Michigan Trial Court Consolidation, Volume Five: Final Evaluation of Lake County Demonstration Project* (Denver, CO: National Center for State Courts, Court Services Division, 1998), Chapter III.